



LIGHT OF UNITY CELEBRATION

A festive gathering with storytelling and songs
to celebrate the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh
and the Birth of the Báb



BAHÁ'Í FAITH
**LIGHT OF UNITY
FESTIVAL**
2017 – 2019

TO THE HOSTS:

Dear Friends,

This booklet was compiled to accompany you in hosting individual festive gatherings to celebrate the bicentenary anniversaries of the births of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb.

Bahá'u'lláh – October 22, 2017

The Báb – October 29, 2019

Hosting a gathering in your home at any time during this festive season is a warm and welcoming way to invite your friends and family to share in your joy, to impart the stories of these two Divine Messengers, and to spark authentic, meaningful conversations in a spiritual atmosphere.

Some suggestions for how to use this booklet:

Invitations—Let guests know what to expect by inviting them to “a special meal with festive activities in celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh.”

Stories—Have a copy of the booklet for each guest. Invite them to take turns reading aloud. Allow plenty of time for discussion, but do keep things moving along. Please allow at least an hour and a half for relaxed conversation.

Arts—For the suggested craft projects you will need: colored pencils, strips of construction paper, and glue sticks. Children will enjoy these projects, and they are designed to be engaging and thought-provoking for adults, too.

Songs—The selections are easy to learn and share. Search online for links to hear the tunes if you are not already familiar with them. Have some small instruments available to encourage children's participation.

Flowers—Flowers on the table reflect the beauty of God's creation and offer an opportunity to share the concept of humanity being like “the flowers of one garden.” Roses and rosewater help create a fragrant and spiritual atmosphere.

Food—Your gathering may include a dinner, a pot-luck, or dessert and tea with time for discussion. Simple is best. Have easy-to-prepare-and-serve refreshments so your focus can be on the guests. Bahá'u'lláh often shared flowers, sweets, baklava, and oranges with His visitors. Consider offering some of these at your own gathering.

Have a wonderful celebration!

—Compiled by Joyce Litoff,
U.S. Bahá'í Office of Communications

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WELCOME!

We come together at this festive time to sing songs of celebration and tell stories of love and heroism that extol the transcendent lives and spiritual legacies of Bahá'u'lláh, the Glory of God, and His Forerunner, the Báb.

In 2017 we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, and in 2019, we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Birth of the Báb.

Although there are many in the world who have not yet heard the story of these two Divine Messengers, there is no soul on the planet who remains untouched by Their legacies. The echoes of Their divine teachings of love and unity reverberate around the globe, bringing hope and joy to the hearts of people everywhere.

We are so happy you are with us today as we remember and celebrate the great gifts God has shared with the world through these two spiritual luminaries, these **Lights of Unity.**



*So powerful is the light of unity
that it can illumine the whole world.*
—Bahá'u'lláh¹

We begin with gratitude and praise of God

Happy the days that have been consecrated to the remembrance of God, and blessed the hours which have been spent in praise of Him Who is the All-Wise. —Bahá'u'lláh²

We are grateful for the bonds of friendship that bring us together. By gathering at this table we are strengthening those bonds. We are carving out a time and place for reverence and remembrance of God. Bahá'u'lláh revealed a beautiful prayer that tells us that wherever God is mentioned becomes a blessed place.

► **SONG: Blessed is the Spot** (to sing or read aloud)

*Blessed is the spot, and the house,
and the place, and the city,
and the heart, and the mountain,
and the refuge, and the cave,
and the valley, and the land,
and the sea, and the island,
and the meadow where mention
of God hath been made,
and His praise glorified.*
—Bahá'u'lláh³

Bahá'u'lláh, the Glory of God

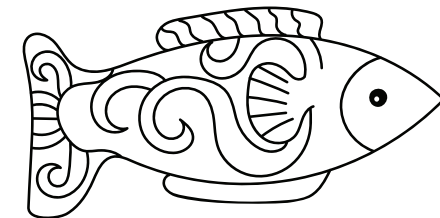
Mírzá Husayn-'Alí, later known as Bahá'u'lláh, "the Glory of God," was born on November 12, 1817 in Tehran, the capital of Persia, now called Iran. (The date on which Bahá'u'lláh's birth is commemorated is based in part on a lunar calendar and varies from year to year.)

Bahá'u'lláh's father held a high-ranking position in the court of the Persian King. When Bahá'u'lláh was a child, His father had a dream in which he saw Bahá'u'lláh,

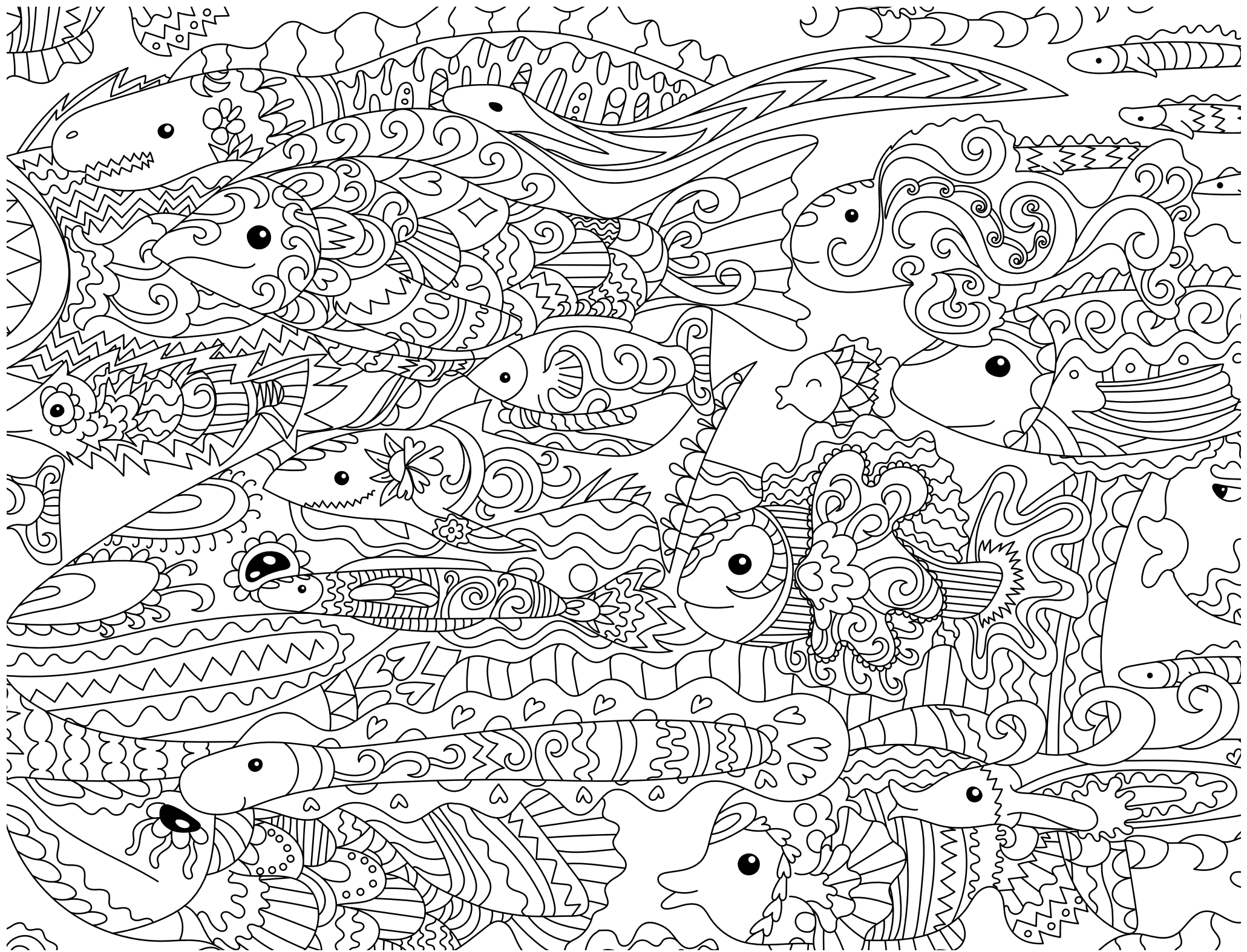
*"...swimming in a vast, limitless ocean. His body shone upon the waters with a radiance that illumined the sea. Around His head, which could distinctly be seen above the waters, there radiated, in all directions, His long, jet-black locks, floating in great profusion above the waves. . . . a multitude of fishes gathered round Him, each holding fast to the extremity of one hair. Fascinated by the effulgence of his face, they followed Him in whatever direction He swam. Great as was their number and however firmly they clung to His locks, not one single hair seemed to have been detached from His head, nor did the least injury affect His person. Free and unrestrained, He moved above the waters and they all followed Him."*⁴

Impressed by this dream, Bahá'u'lláh's father called a man known for his insight and asked him to interpret it for him. This man, as if inspired by a glimpse of the future glory of Bahá'u'lláh, said

*"The limitless ocean that you have seen in your dream is none other than the world of being. Single-handed and alone, your son will achieve supreme ascendancy over it. Wherever He may please, He will proceed unhindered. No one will resist His march, no one will hinder His progress. The multitude of fishes signifies the turmoil which He will arouse amidst the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Around Him will they gather, and to Him will they cling. Assured of the unfailing protection of the Almighty, this tumult will never harm His person, nor will His loneliness upon the sea of life endanger His safety."*⁵



CRAFT: ON NEXT PAGE, FISH TO COLOR ►



As Bahá'u'lláh grew, the signs of His greatness became increasingly clear. He became renowned for His keen insight, His excellent character, His generosity, and compassion. At the age of 18, Bahá'u'lláh married Navváb, and their home became a shelter, a place of light and love and hospitality, open to all.

Bahá'u'lláh was 22 years old when His father passed away. The government offered Bahá'u'lláh His father's ministerial post, but He declined this prominent position. He was not interested in titles and honors; His interest was in defending and protecting the poor and the needy. Instead of pursuing a life of power and leisure, Bahá'u'lláh chose to devote His energies to performing acts of charity and service. He became known as "Father of the Poor."



The Báb, the Gateway to Glory

Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad was born on October 20, 1819 in Shíráz, a city in southern Persia. He later took the title, "the Báb" meaning "the Gate."

The Báb's father died when He was a small child, and His care was left to an uncle with whom He later worked as a merchant. The Báb was an extraordinary youth Who possessed both intelligence and personal charm. He married Khadíjih-Bagum and together they had just one son, who died in infancy.

In 1844, in Shíráz, the Báb declared that He had been called by God to be humanity's gateway to a new and glorious future.

As one of God's Divine Educators, the Báb established a new religion. He called for the people to prepare for the coming of "Him Whom God shall make manifest," another Divine Messenger Who would soon appear and initiate an era of global justice, unity, and peace.

This was a time of great religious expectation. Predictions by Bible scholars sparked a wave of new Adventist movements in the United States and Europe. In the Middle East, scholars of Islam eagerly spread the word that the "day of the return" foretold in the Qur'an was at hand. Other faiths and traditions around the world also long anticipated the appearance of a Promised One.

Shortly after the Báb's Declaration, a letter containing some of His writings found its way to Bahá'u'lláh. He was deeply moved by the Báb's message and immediately arose to support His cause.

The Báb was an advocate of the poor. He supported the advancement of women, universal education, and the study of science—radical ideas in that time and place.

The religious and civil authorities were threatened by these progressive teachings. They imprisoned and tortured Him and hundreds of His followers, called Bábís. Despite these persecutions, the movement spread like wildfire.

In 1850, the Báb was executed by firing squad in a public square in Tabriz. But a light had been lit in the land which was not to be so easily extinguished.

Bahá'u'lláh was among the many who remained faithful after the Martyrdom of the Báb. Bahá'u'lláh led efforts to maintain unity of the Bábí community—a community the government and clergy wanted to exterminate.

Bahá'u'lláh is Imprisoned

In 1852, Bahá'u'lláh was arrested along with hundreds of other Bábís. He was taken in chains to the “Black Pit,” a foul underground prison. The conditions there were inhumane. Nearly 150 men were crowded together in the filthy, dark, icy-cold space. The chain around Bahá'u'lláh’s neck weighed more than 100 pounds, and He bore scars from it for the rest of His life.

Day after day, one by one, prisoners were summoned for execution. They exhibited the utmost courage in the face of torture and death. Their reliance on God helped them to overcome their fear. They were sustained by the powerful prayer of the Báb:

*Is there any Remover of difficulties save God?
Say: Praised be God! He is God! All are His servants,
and all abide by His bidding! –The Báb⁶*

Bahá'u'lláh taught His fellow prisoners certain verses which they chanted every night. “God is sufficient unto me; He verily is the All-sufficing,” one row would chant, and the other would reply: “in Him let the trusting trust.” Into the early hours of the morning, the chorus of their brave voices could be heard. Their melody was so strong that it reached the ears of the king in the palace above. “What means this sound?” he was reported to have asked. “It is the anthem the Bábís are intoning in their prison,” was the reply. The King fell silent in response.⁷



► **SONG: God is Sufficient unto Me**

God is sufficient unto me;
He verily is the All-sufficing
in Him let the trusting trust.

► **CRAFT/REFLECTION: CHAINS**

In *The Hidden Words* Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

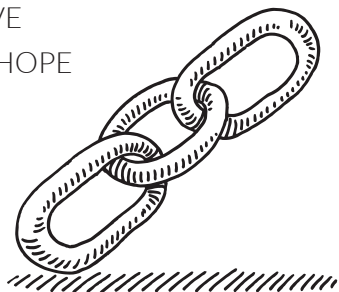
*O MY SERVANT! Free thyself from the fetters of this world, and loose thy soul from the prison of self. Seize thy chance, for it will come to thee no more.*⁸

Consider ways people may feel imprisoned in their lives. What chains might they carry? What spiritual virtues might be cultivated to break free of these chains?

On a strip of paper, write a difficulty you or someone you know may be experiencing. Think about a possible spiritual solution and write it on the reverse side. Loop and glue these strips into a paper chain. How might problems in the world be addressed by spiritual solutions?

For example:

- FEAR is overcome by RELIANCE ON GOD
- ANGER is overcome by UNDERSTANDING
- HATE is overcome by LOVE
- DESPAIR is overcome by HOPE



Bahá'u'lláh is Called by God

During His imprisonment Bahá'u'lláh had a profound mystical experience:

*“... I was but a man like others, asleep upon My couch, when lo, the breezes of the All-Glorious were wafted over Me, and taught Me the knowledge of all that hath been. This thing is not from Me, but from One Who is Almighty and All-Knowing. And He bade Me lift up My voice between earth and heaven, and for this there befell Me what hath caused the tears of every man of understanding to flow...”*⁹

*“During the days I lay in the prison of Tíhrán, though the galling weight of the chains and the stench-filled air allowed Me but little sleep, still in those infrequent moments of slumber I felt as if something flowed from the crown of My head over My breast, even as a mighty torrent that precipitateth itself upon the earth from the summit of a lofty mountain. Every limb of my body would, as a result, be set afire. At such moments My tongue recited what no man could bear to hear...”*¹⁰

This event is comparable to those great moments of the ancient past when God revealed Himself to His earlier Messengers: When Moses stood before the Burning Bush; when the Buddha received enlightenment under the Bodhi tree; when the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, descended upon Jesus; when the angel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad. This was Bahá'u'lláh's summons to serve as God's Messenger.

► **DISCUSSION:** Throughout the ages Divine Messengers appear and are rejected by all but a few followers. Over time, Their teachings take root and eventually lead to whole new civilizations. Pause to reflect on this recurrent story in human history.



‘Abdu’l-Bahá, a Devoted Son

Bahá’u’lláh endured four months in the “Black Pit.” Upon His release, He was banished from His homeland in what was to be the beginning of 40 years of betrayal, persecution, imprisonment, and repeated exile. Yet, wherever He went, people recognized Bahá’u’lláh’s spiritual power and loving-kindness and were drawn to Him.

Bahá’u’lláh did not immediately disclose to others that He had received a revelation from God, but His nine-year-old son, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, recognized the spiritual change in Him. This son became His Father’s closest aide and companion.

► **DISCUSSION:** How are children sometimes able to see things adults cannot?

Bahá’u’lláh becomes God’s Messenger

In April 1863, Bahá’u’lláh announced that He was the Promised One foretold by the Báb and all of the Divine Messengers of the past.

Bahá’u’lláh’s Mission as God’s Messenger for this day was to spiritually re-awaken humanity and unite all the peoples of the world.

This Youth hath come to quicken the world and unite all its peoples. The day is approaching when that which God hath purposed will have prevailed and thou shalt behold the earth transformed into the all-glorious paradise. –Bahá’u’lláh ¹¹

Through Bahá’u’lláh God has released a fresh, far-reaching, creative spiritual energy into the world. Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings shed new light on God’s eternal relationship with humanity and offer a vision of infinite hope and healing.

This is the Day in which God’s most excellent favors have been poured out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace hath been infused into all created things. It is incumbent upon all the peoples of the world to reconcile their differences, and, with perfect unity and peace, abide beneath the shadow of the Tree of His care and loving-kindness –Bahá’u’lláh ¹²



Bahá'u'lláh shared a prescription for peace. Imagine a world in which these principles are widely practiced.

- *We are one human family*
- *World religions are from one God*
- *Prejudice must end*
- *Women and men are equal*
- *Education for all*
- *Economic Justice*
- *Science and religion are in harmony*

► SONG: We All Come from God

We all come from God
And unto Him shall we return

We all come from God
And unto Him shall we return

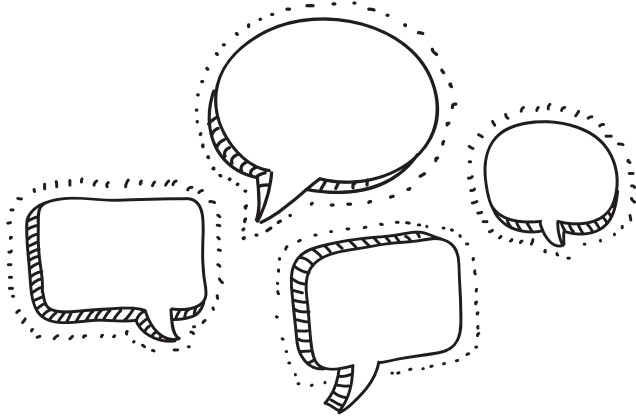
Like a stream flowing back
To the ocean
Or a ray of light
Returning to the Sun

Bahá'u'lláh's Legacy of Unity

Bahá'u'lláh's final exile was to the prison city of 'Akká, in Ottoman Palestine, in current-day Israel. Although the early years in 'Akká were hard, by the late 1870s, Bahá'u'lláh was granted limited freedom. He continued to reveal the word of God until he passed away peacefully on May 29, 1892.

Bahá'u'lláh's life and mission are becoming increasingly known across the planet. Millions of people are finding comfort and hope in His message of unity and are learning to apply His teachings for the betterment of the world.





► FOR DISCUSSION/REFLECTION:

In his compilation, “Stories of Bahá’u’lláh,” ‘Alí-Akbar Furútan relates that Bahá’u’lláh often remarked: “There are four qualities which I love to see manifested in people: first, enthusiasm and courage; second, a face wreathed in smiles and a radiant countenance; third, that they see all things with their own eyes and not through the eyes of others; fourth, the ability to carry a task, once begun, through to its end.”¹³

Which of these qualities comes easily for you? Which would you like to increase in your life in the months ahead? How might you do so?



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CLOSING

We are so grateful that we could come together to celebrate the lives and legacies of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. We pray that we may each be inspired by God to find ways to embrace the oneness of humanity, to build just and peaceful communities, to make this a better world for all.

We close with a prayer.

O Divine Providence! This assemblage is composed of Thy friends who are attracted to Thy beauty and are set ablaze by the fire of Thy love. Turn these souls into heavenly angels, resuscitate them through the breath of Thy Holy Spirit, grant them eloquent tongues and resolute hearts, bestow upon them heavenly power and merciful susceptibilities, cause them to become the promulgators of the oneness of mankind and the cause of love and concord in the world of humanity, so that the perilous darkness of ignorant prejudice may vanish through the light of the Sun of Truth, this dreary world may become illumined, this material realm may absorb the rays of the world of spirit, these different colors may merge into one color and the melody of praise may rise to the kingdom of Thy sanctity.

Verily, Thou art the Omnipotent and the Almighty!
—‘Abdu’l-Bahá¹⁴

ENCORE: MORE FESTIVE SONGS

We Have Come to Sing Praises –Van Gilmer

(Note: The phrases “Alláh-u-Abhá!” (God is Most Glorious) or “Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá!” (O Thou the Glory of the Most Glorious!) are used in greeting and to acknowledge the presence and glory of God.)

We have come to sing praises to our Lord.
 We have come to sing praises to our Lord.
 Alláh-u-Abhá! Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá! *
 We have come to sing praises to our Lord.

Verse 2: We have come to give honor to our Lord.
 Verse 3: We have come to give thanks to our Lord.
 Verse 4: We have come to sing praises to our Lord.

UNITY SONG –Bahá’í Aikane Singing Group

(Call and response)

We are drops of one ocean.
 We are waves of one sea.

CHORUS: Come and join us in our quest for unity.
 It’s a way of life for you and me.

We are flowers of one garden.
 We are leaves of one tree.

CHORUS

All the world is one country.
 Mankind is one, can’t you see?

CHORUS

REFERENCES

¹Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p.288

²Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 138

³Bahá'í Prayers, p. ii

⁴The Dawn-Breakers, p. 119

⁵Ibid.

⁶Selections from the Writings of the Báb, p. 217

⁷The Dawn-Breakers, p. 632

⁸The Hidden Words, Persian #40

⁹Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 11

¹⁰Ibid. p. 22

¹¹The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 144

¹²Gleanings, p. 6

¹³Stories of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Alí-Akbar Furútan, p. 51

¹⁴Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 105

